

DRAFT

Patrick Koepele
Tuolumne River Preservation Trust
914 Thirteenth Street
Modesto, CA 95354

Dear Mr. Koepele:

I am writing in support of the Tuolumne River Floodplain Restoration-La Grange project.

The San Joaquin River Management Program provides a forum to identify problems and solutions to issues related to wildlife, flood protection, water quality, water supply, fisheries, and recreation. The SJRMP Action Team and Advisory Council have reviewed and discussed this project and support the floodplain and riparian restoration for the benefit of both riparian habitat and the San Joaquin fall-run chinook salmon.

The Advisory Council is in support of the project proposed by Tuolumne River Preservation Trust and understands that restoring the floodplain and riparian habitat will improve aquatic ecosystem conditions.

The 1995 San Joaquin River Management Plan recommends projects related to flood protection and restoration of riparian corridor (see p. 70). This recommendation is based upon improving and restoring areas previously mined for gold and gravel along with poorly managed grazing. The implementation of this project is a step towards increasing quantity and diversity of riparian habitat to increase species numbers and community diversity.

If you have any questions in this regard, please call Paula Landis at (559) 230-3310.

Sincerely,

Timothy Ramirez, Chair
San Joaquin River Management Program
Advisory Council

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DOCUMENTATION
IS ON THE
FOLLOWING PAGES**

Tuolumne River Floodplain Restoration La Grange

Executive Summary

Stanislaus County presently owns approximately 200 acres of Tuolumne River floodplain near the town of La Grange. The land extends from approximately RM 49.2 – 50.6 on the south bank and from RM 49.9 – RM 50.6 on the north bank. This is a proposal to undertake a floodplain and riparian restoration project on this county-owned land to recreate a more natural environment for the benefit of riparian species and San Joaquin fall-run chinook salmon.

A 60-year legacy of gold mining, grazing, and dam construction has resulted in fragmented riparian stands, poor or non-existent valley oak and cottonwood regeneration, fossilized alluvial deposits, remnant pits that periodically strand juvenile chinook salmon during receding high flows, and reduced spawning gravel storage within the bankfull channel. Extensive gold dredging (from valley wall to valley wall) occurred through the 1940's, leaving no defined channel, and voluminous dredger tailings piled on floodplain surfaces. Flood events after 1937 began reinitiating a defined channel through the tailings, but by 1963 the channel still lacked defined floodplains and meander sequences. These dredger tailings were removed for the construction of New Don Pedro Dam from 1965 to 1970. Their removal left shallow pits and non-draining surfaces. After New Don Pedro Dam was completed in 1971, the channel between river mile 50.5 and 46.6 was reconstructed to improve chinook salmon spawning habitat. However, riparian vegetation and floodplains were not restored, and cattle grazing and flow regulation has discouraged riparian regeneration at the site. White alder and narrow-leaf willow have encroached onto point bars, partially fossilizing these alluvial deposits. Lastly, the 1997 flood deposited tens of thousands of cubic yards of sand in the reach. The interaction between floodplain elevation, riparian vegetation and a contemporary bankfull discharge must be restored.

The goals of this project are to recreate a native riparian forest and reduce sediment influx to prime spawning beds. The objectives for the restoration project are:

- Increase woody riparian vegetation coverage.
- Improve natural regeneration of Fremont cottonwood, valley oak, tree willows and alder.
- Remove invasive exotic hardwood vegetation.
- Reduce impacts due to cattle grazing.
- Reduce juvenile chinook salmon stranding.
- Reduce fine sediment (sand) storage in the floodway.
- Restore functional floodplains.
- Construct a loop trail system for public access.

The hypothesis of this project is that a reconstructed floodplain, vegetation management, and the better management of cattle will rehabilitate riparian regeneration processes, increase riparian habitat complexity, and reduce fine sediment influx to the channel.